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ABSTRACT

A survey was developed to identify critical factors in job selection and retention for speech/language pathologists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists. The survey was completed by 455 New Mexico professionals in these disciplines. A principal-components analysis identified six factors that were important in career decisions: (1) opportunities for professional development/advancement; (2) professional relationships and program philosophy/environment; (3) salary and prestige; (4) types of clients and caseload; (5) flexibility in work schedule; and (6) job location and benefits. All disciplines agreed that professional relationships and program philosophy/environment were most important, followed by the geographical location and benefits of the position. The least important factor was salary and prestige. Some discipline-specific differences were revealed. Implications are noted for recruitment and retention efforts of programs who hire professionals from these disciplines. (Author/JDD)

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Factors Related to the Recruitment and Retention of Professionals from Specialized Disciplines

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Abstract

One difficult issue facing early intervention programs is the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel from specialized fields. Project TIE (Teams in Early Intervention), an inservice training model, developed a survey to identify critical factors in job selection and retention for speech/language pathologists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists. The survey was completed by 455 professionals in these disciplines. A principal-components analysis identified six factors that were important in career decisions: (1) Opportunities for professional development /advancement, (2) Professional relationships and program philosophy/environment, (3) Salary and prestige, (4) Types of clients and caseload, (5) Flexibility in work schedule, and (6) Job location and benefits. The average ratings of the survey items composing each factor showed respondents rated most factors as very important or somewhat important. All disciplines agreed professional relationships and program philosophy/environment (Factor 2) were most important, followed by the geographical location and benefits of a position (Factor 6). Salary and prestige (Factor 3) was the least important consideration. Some discipline specific differences and background characteristics of professionals were also related to the extent factors affected career decisions. The findings have implications for recruitment and retention efforts of programs who hire professionals from these specialized disciplines.

TIE RESEARCH RESULTS

Introduction

Project TIE (Teams in Early Intervention) is an inservice training model designed to respond to the need to train individuals from a variety of disciplines to become competent early interventionists. TIE training is aimed to giving parents, health care professionals, speech/language pathologists and occupational and physical therapists a common framework for early intervention and methods to work effectively as team members. While this training meets the intent of the project, staff also recognized that one of the most difficult issues facing early intervention programs is the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel from specialized fields. For this reason, we attempted to ascertain critical factors in job selection and retention for speech/language pathologists (SLPs), physical therapists (PTs) and occupational therapists (OTs). We hoped that our findings would prove informative and useful to the administrators of programs for young children with special needs.

Methods

A survey was designed and sent to all licensed speech/language pathologists, occupational therapists and physical therapists in the state of New Mexico. Approximately 1500 surveys were distributed to these professionals statewide, regardless of the type of setting in which they were currently employed. A stamped return envelope was included, along with a letter explaining the reasons for our interest. Approximately 30% of the surveys (n=455) were returned. Table 1 describes the background characteristics of the survey respondents, the large majority of whom were women (93, 86, and 86% for SLPs, PTs and OTs, respectively).

Professionals were asked to rate the importance of 27 items in making career decisions using a four point scale (i.e., 1=very important, 2=somewhat important, 3=minimally important, and 4=not important). Their ratings were then subjected to a principal-components analysis to determine how the items clustered to produce different factors that figure into decisions about accepting or continuing to work in a position.

Table 1. Background Characteristics

	Speech/Language Pathologists	Physical Therapists	Occupational Therapists
Sample Size	209	164	82
Age*	40 (8)	37 (7)	40 (9)
Years Experience Current Job*	6 (5)	4 (3)	4 (3)
Overall Experience (years)	12 (7)	11 (7)	12 (7)
Percent Time Employed*	93 (18)	86 (23)	86 (24)
Educational Level (percent)*			
Bachelors	1	78	68
Masters	96	20	32
Ph.D.	3	2	0
Ethnicity (percent)			
Native American	2	0	0
Hispanic	7	6	4
Anglo	86	89	92
Other	5	5	4
Place of Work (percent)			
Public School	64	16	45
Early Intervention Program	3	2	3
Hospital	7	36	20
Private Clinic	6	21	9
University	5	2	3
Other	15	23	20

Note. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations of the means.

* Tests of discipline differences were significant at the .01 alpha level.

Results

Table 2 describes the six factors uncovered in the analysis. Table 3 lists the survey items that clustered into each factor. The average ratings of the survey items composing each factor were computed. Figure 1 shows the majority of respondents tended to rate most factors as very important or somewhat important. However, there were significant differences among the factors in ratings of importance [$F(2,439)=3.08$, $p<.05$]. Table 4 shows the ordering of factors in terms of their relative importance in affecting career decisions. This table also shows the disciplines differed in their pattern of ratings on these factors [$F(10,2195)=2.94$, $p<.01$]. SLPs, PTs, and OTs all agreed professional relationships and program philosophy and environment (Factor 2) were most important, followed by the geographical location and benefits of a position (Factor 6). Interestingly, salary and prestige (Factor 3) was the least important consideration, although it was still viewed as somewhat important in affecting career decisions. Both PTs and OTs rated flexibility in work schedule (Factor 5) as relatively more important than opportunities for professional advancement or development (Factor 1) whereas the reverse was the case for SLPs.

There also were significant differences among disciplines in the degree to which a factor was important, but only for items composing Factors 4 and 5 (see Figure 1). Specifically, PTs viewed the types of clients and caseload (Factor 4) as somewhat less important in comparison to SLPs or OTs [$F(2,445)=3.57$, $p<.05$]. Both PTs and OTs felt flexibility in their work schedule (Factor 5) was more important than SLPs [$F(2,442)=5.70$, $p<.01$]. A step-wise multiple regression analysis which controlled for background characteristics (i.e., percent time employed, education, age, years current experience, years overall experience) showed the discipline differences remained significant for Factor 4, despite its correlation with overall experience; the types of clients and caseload were more important for less experienced professionals [$r=-.16$, $p<.01$]. In contrast, the discipline differences on Factor 5 were due entirely to its correlations with the percent of time employed and age. Flexibility in the work schedule was more important for those who worked fewer hours [$r=-.53$, $p<.001$] and for younger individuals [$r=-.16$, $p<.01$].

The step-wise multiple regression analyses also revealed additional relationships between some background variables and some factors important in career decisions. The number of years current experience was correlated with Factor 1 [$r=-.11$, $p<.05$] and the percent of time employed correlated with Factor 6 [$r=.13$, $p<.025$]. Opportunities for advancement or development were more important for those who had spent less time in their current position, and job location and benefits were more important for individuals who worked more hours.

Table 2. Summary Statistics From the Principal-Components Analysis

FACTOR	DESCRIPTION OF FACTOR	EIGENVALUE	PERCENT VARIANCE
1	Opportunities for professional development and/or advancement	5.5	22.9
2	Professional relationships and program philosophy/environment	2.1	8.8
3	Salary and prestige	1.8	7.5
4	Types of clients and caseload	1.7	6.9
5	Flexibility in work schedule	1.4	6.0
6	Job location and benefits	1.2	4.9
TOTAL PERCENT OF VARIANCE			56.9

Note. The principal components analysis used a varimax rotation. The factors were derived from 299 survey respondents who completed all questions.

Table 3. Factor Loadings of the Survey Items

SURVEY ITEMS (QUESTION NUMBER)	FACTORS					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Access to a university: release time (18c)	.84	.	.	.	.	.
Access to a university: tuition assistance (18b)	.83	.	.	.	.	.
Access to a university: relevant courses (18a)	.83	.	.	.	.	.
Access to resources (10)	.62	.	.	.	.	.
Opportunities for professional development: financial assistance (8a)	.61	.	.	.	.	.
Opportunities for professional development: release time (8b)	.57	.	.	.	.	.
Opportunities for advancement/other challenges (12)	.45	.	.	.	.	.
Relationships with co-workers: other team members (5b)	.	.71	.	.	.	.
Administrative support (7)	.	.66	.	.	.	.
Relationships with co-workers: same discipline (5a)	.	.63	.	.	.	.
Program philosophy (11)	.	.62	.	.	.	.
Supervisors (6)	.	.61	.	.	.	.
Working environment (9)	.	.54	.	.	.	.
Salary (4)	.	.	.71	.	.	.
Financial need (14)	.	.	.68	.	.	.
Prestige (13)	.	.	.55	.	.	.
Population served/caseload: types of clients (2c)	.	.	.	.84	.	.
Population served/caseload: age of clients (2b)	.	.	.	.82	.	.
Population served/caseload: numbers of clients (2a)	.	.	.	.58	.	.
Opportunity to work part time (16)	.	.	.	.	.84	.
Flexibility in work schedule (15)	.	.	.	.	.79	.
Benefits: insurance (3b)	.	.	.	.	.	.65
Benefits: vacation/leave (3a)	.	.	.	.	.	.64
Geographical location (city, town, state) (1)	.	.	.	.	.	.47

Note. All items loaded on only one factor (i.e., no item had a loading of .40 or greater on more than one factor).

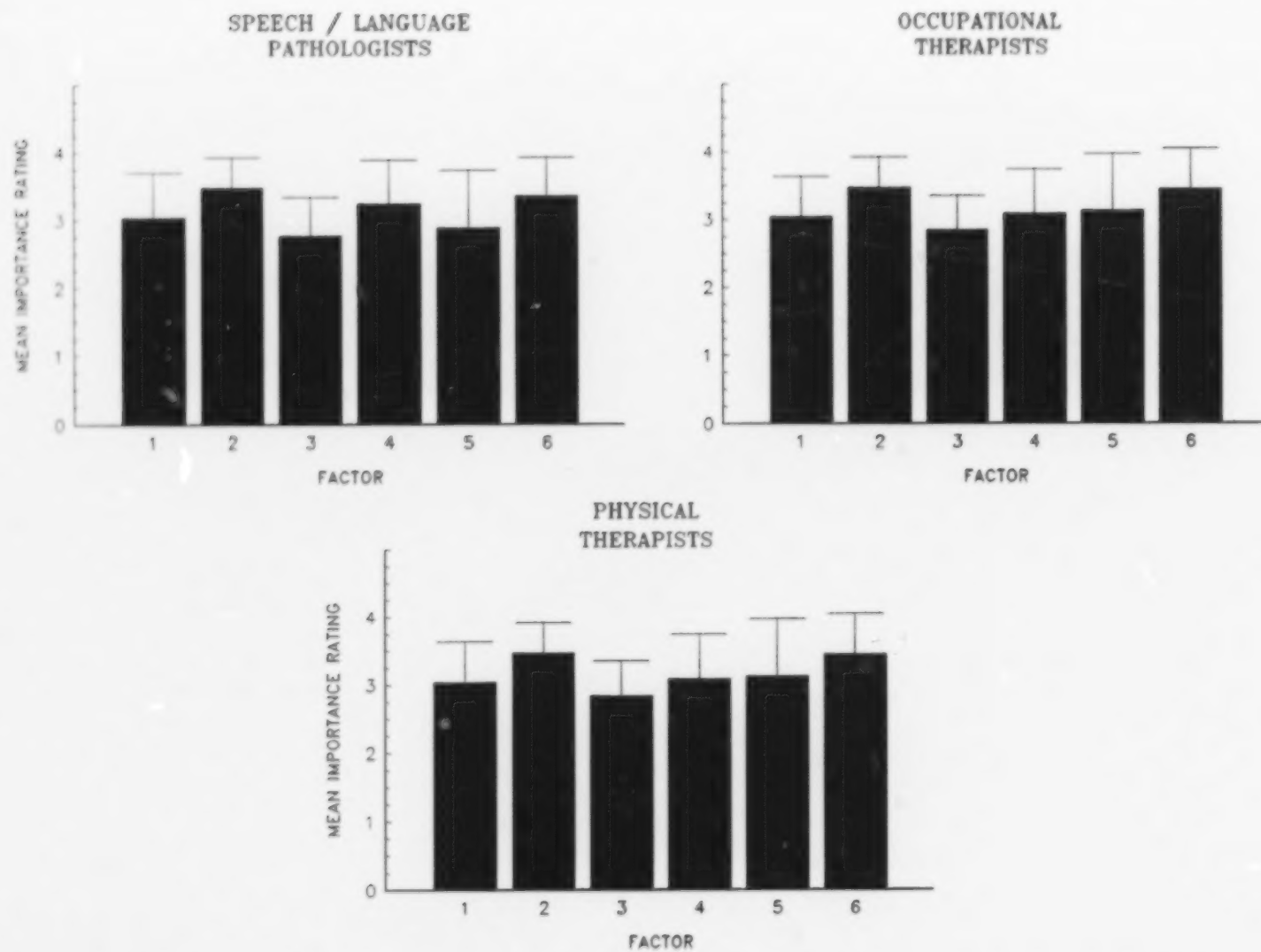


Figure 1. The importance of factors in making career decisions

Table 4. Rank Ordering of the Importance of Factors as They Affect Decisions to Accept or Continue to Work in a Position.

FACTOR	DESCRIPTION OF FACTOR	ORDER OF IMPORTANCE ¹			
		SLP	PT	OT	MEAN
1	Opportunities for professional development and/or advancement	4	5	5	5
2	Professional relationships and program philosophy/environment	1	1	1	1
3	Salary and prestige	6	6	6	6
4	Types of clients and caseload	3	4	4	3
5	Flexibility in work schedule	5	3	3	4
6	Job location and benefits	2	2	2	2

¹ The relative order of importance was based on the average of the ratings of importance for survey items composing each factor. For each discipline, statistically significant differences were found among factors in mean ratings of importance.

Conclusions

These results have implications for recruitment and retention efforts. Administrators who need to hire professionals from these specialized disciplines may want to emphasize or develop features of their programs that relate to job selection and satisfaction. For example, since professional relationships and program philosophy/environment (Factor 2) were of primary importance to all disciplines, administrators should highlight or, if necessary, strengthen such aspects of the program. The factor rated second in relative importance by all disciplines was job location and benefits (Factor 6). Although the location of a position cannot be altered, administrators can influence the benefits available to staff. While all disciplines rated salary and prestige (Factor 3) last in relative importance, these issues were still rated as somewhat important which suggests they are significant and need to be addressed in recruitment and retention efforts.

The correlation of some background characteristics with the degree some factors affected career decisions should also alert administrators to characteristics of professionals that may impact on their career decisions and job satisfaction. In particular, administrators may want to allow for flexibility in work schedules (Factor 5) for professionals who work part time especially as they are less concerned with job benefits (Factor 6). Further, efforts to provide clear avenues for advancement or professional development (Factor 1) may be especially important for recruiting and retaining new employees.